

VZCZCXRO5508
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHEG #7041/01 3381447
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 041447Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2793
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CAIRO 007041

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/04/2026
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ARABL](#) [UNGA](#) [MARR](#) [EG](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: (C) SOMALI DIPLOMAT PROVIDES ARAB LEAGUE MINUTES
OF MEETING WITH ISLAMIC COURTS LEADER AWEYS

REF: CAIRO 6937

Classified by Minister-Counselor for Economic and Political
Affairs William R. Stewart for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Cairo-based Somali diplomat Ismail Hussein (strictly protect) provided poloff with an Arabic-language document purported to be an Arab League (AL) internal summary of November 2-3 meetings in Mogadishu between senior League staff and Somali Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) leader Sheikh Hassan Aweys. The Somali diplomat, loyal to Transitional Federal Government (TFG) President Abdullahi Youssef, shared the document in an effort to "prove" that the League is sympathetic to the Courts. While post cannot vouch for the authenticity of the document, our conversations with Arab League contacts lead us to believe that its contents accurately reflect League views on Somalia.

12. (C) The document is not a smoking-gun indictment of Arab League collaboration with the CIC, as Hussein suggested. Rather it reflects a fairly balanced League approach to maintaining both Arab and African participation in future peace talks. The Arab League desire to prevent Ethiopia from becoming the IGAD (Inter-Governmental Agency for Development) representative presiding - jointly with Sudan, representing the African Union - over future Somalia negotiations is apparent, and reflects the Arab League view that Ethiopia, a major protagonist in the conflict, would not be a neutral mediator. The report was purportedly sent by Arab League African Affairs Office Director Samir Hosni to AL Secretary General Amre Moussa.

13. (SBU) Embassy translation of Somalia document:

Begin text:

Thursday, November 2, 2006

The AL General Secretariat's delegation included Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Ambassador Ahmed Ben

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Helli, Director of the Secretary General's Office Hisham Youssef, and Fouad Bestengui of the Africa and Arab-African Cooperation Department.

At the beginning of the meeting, Ambassador Ben Helli welcomed Sheikh Taher Aweys and said that it was a good opportunity to talk to the leadership of the Islamic Courts to clear up many issues, such as the recent negotiations scheduled for October 30, 2006 that were postponed. Ambassador Ben Helli added that the Arab League was concerned in the first place about Somalia's interests, and noted that the Secretary General was always addressing the Somalia issue like other issues of importance on the Arab scene, such as Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine.

In turn, Aweys said that the postponement of the negotiations

was not caused by the Courts, but due to acts carried out by the army of the enemy (Ethiopia), such as its incursion into Somali territory. Aweys criticized the Arabs for forgetting the Somali issue for the past fifteen years (the period of the civil war). He also expressed strong anger because the Arab League could not confront Ethiopia and have it pull out its forces from Somalia. He likened Ethiopia to Israel and said that the Arabs were just as afraid of it as they were of Israel.

On involving Kenya in the presidency of the negotiations scheduled for October 30, 2006 without the agreement of the Islamic Courts - because the presidency of IGAD will be transferred after two months to Ethiopia, which is rejected by the Islamic Courts - Ambassador Ben Helli justified the League's position by saying that the League deals with the political aspect of the matter and that excluding the African side from the negotiations is impossible, especially since Kenya is considered a moderate African outlet that could be a partner in the negotiations.

Ambassador Ben Helli spoke about the League's position during the September 25, 2006 UN Security Council session which addressed a draft resolution to lift the arms embargo against Somalia to pave the way for sending African forces to Somalia. He pointed out that the League worked to push the negotiations between the Courts and the government forward. Ben Helli told Aweys that Ethiopia is currently considered a weak country and would not affect the negotiating process. Ben Helli tried to convince Aweys that Ethiopia would not take over the IGAD Presidency from Kenya in two months, and that AL Secretary General Amre Moussa was working to keep the Somalia portfolio in Kenya's hands without transferring it to Ethiopia.

Ben Helli requested Aweys to set a new date for resuming

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negotiations and assured him that the Arab League would work to mediate any obstacles between the Courts and Kenya for the sake of resuming negotiations. He added that involving the African side - represented by Kenya - is extremely important because it was not possible to exclude the African side from the talks. He advised Aweys not to set conditions for resumption of negotiations, such as withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, and to engage in talks where such issues and demands could be discussed via negotiation.

Aweys described Kenya as cunning and accused it of helping Ethiopia in the past to occupy Somalia. However, he eventually expressed confidence in the Arab League and promised to study the situation and reply to the League as soon as possible.

Friday, November 3, 2006

The General Secretariat's delegation included Ambassador Ben Helli, Hisham Youssef, and Fouad Bestengui. Samir Hosni, Office Director for African Affairs, and Secretariat Staff Member Zeid Al Sabban joined the delegation following word of postponement of a third round of AL-sponsored talks in Khartoum.

Mr. Hosni presented a detailed explanation of the obstacles to the negotiations. He explained that the Courts delegation adhered to its pre-condition, i.e., withdrawal of Ethiopian forces, and said that the main goal of its participation was to declare a certain political position, not simply to talk. He said there were pressures being exerted by different agencies on President Abdallahi Youssef to appoint Speaker of the Transitional Parliament El-Sherif Hasan as head of the TFG delegation. Nevertheless, President Youssef appointed Minister of Constitution and Federal Affairs Abdallah Sheikh Ismail as TFG delegation head. Hosni pointed out that the Arab League was severely criticized by the TFG, which had similarly bashed the Sudanese government during talks there.

Hosni added that a small group was formed in Nairobi to prepare for a third round of negotiations, with the participation of the Arab League, Yemen, Sudan, the European Union, and other parties.

Ambassador Ben Helli addressed a few questions to Aweys on the truth of press reporting that the Courts military forces were located on the outskirts of Bidoa City and that they were being assisted by Eritrean troops, and called for self-restraint by the Courts.

On a date for the next round of negotiations, Hosni said that a tentative date was set among the individuals of the international community in Sudan that it should not exceed December 15, 2006. Ben Helli asked if the Courts would be able to provide security for the medical mission sent to Mogadishu by the AL Secretariat.

Aweys advised the AL to exercise patience with the negotiations and that what is taking place is just a crisis that will eventually pass. He said that the West and African countries were patient for two years with the formation of the current Somali government, which he described as a failure. On a date for resumption of negotiations, he said that consultation should be conducted between the Courts' Consultative Council and the Courts' Executive Council to select a date. He implied that the Courts agreed to Kenya's participation in presiding over the negotiations without alternation with Ethiopia. Aweys said the Courts had confidence in the Arab League and that the Courts had no intention of attacking Bidoa.

Answering a question on Eritrea, Aweys said it extended assistance to the Courts forces and provided the Courts with light and old weapons and some military experts that did not exceed ten. He added that the Courts would provide security for the medical team sent by the Arab League, but requested that the team be equipped with pharmaceuticals for the widely spread diseases in Somalia and that the doctors be professionally qualified to treat the people in Mogadishu. He noted that the number of displaced persons is increasing daily and that the airport and harbor in Mogadishu needed international effort and support to operate efficiently.

Ambassador Ben Helli explained that the Arab League would ensure that Ethiopia does not preside over the negotiations after becoming President of IGAD and that Kenya will continue to preside. Mr. Hosni is to be informed that the Arab League would be discussing the idea of talking to Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh to pressure Ethiopia into withdraw its forces from Somalia.

The meeting was concluded with a promise from the Islamic Courts delegation to contact the Arab League again for

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coordination on the next round of negotiations.

End text.
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